THE END

MARVEL PG

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1 OF 6

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JIM STARLIN

AL MILGROM

You missed it.
All reality has come to an end.
Yes, I, Thanos of Titan, am responsible.
But I did not destroy the universe for the reasons you would assume.
You see, I gained complete mastery over all there was, and then...
...discovered my achievements were naught but an insane joke.

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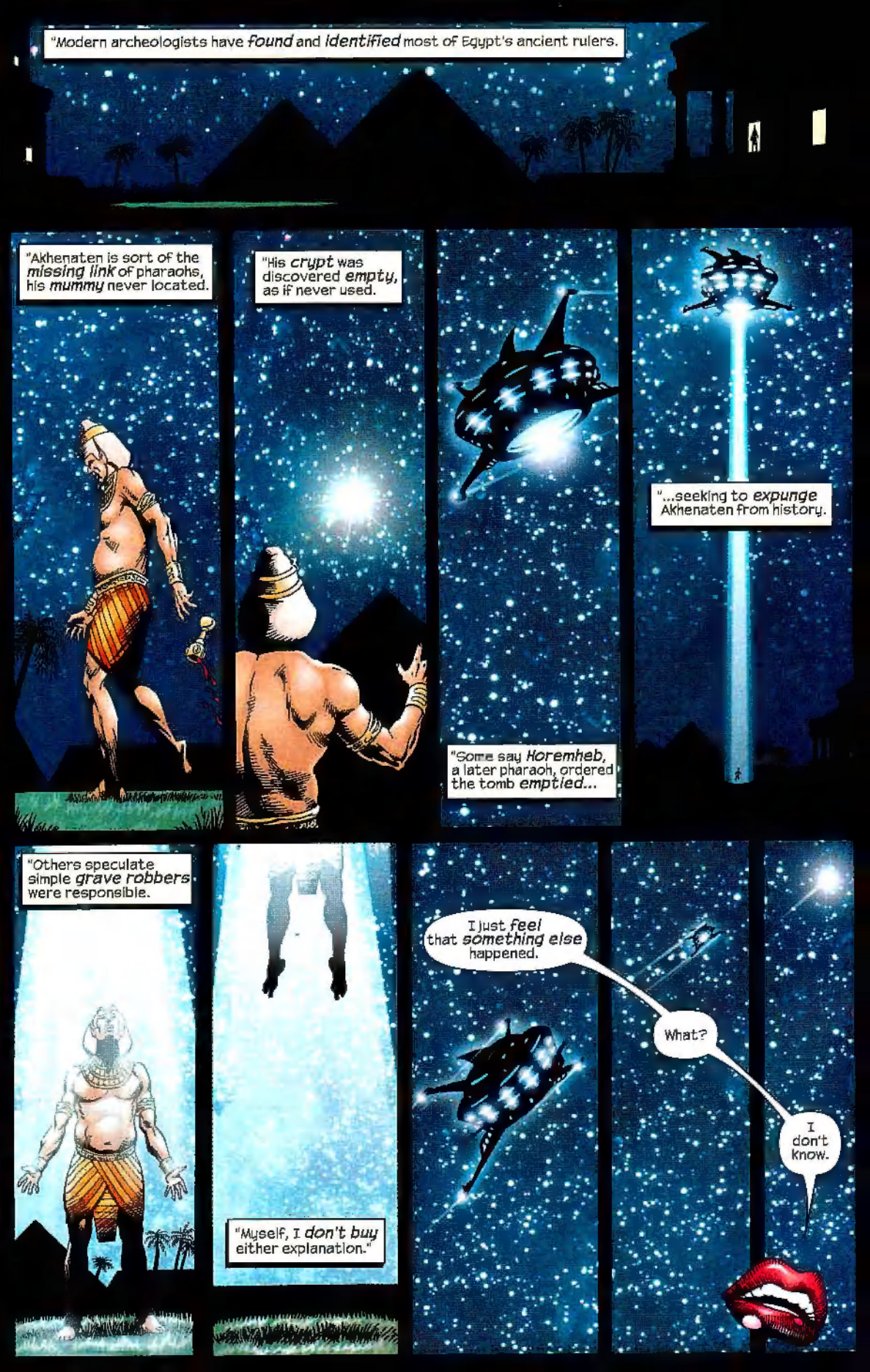
Of course I was destined to annihilate the universe.
From that first moment I laid eyes on Mistress Death, destruction has been my art.
Nearly my entire existence has been devoted to amassing power and dealing out death.
For a time, I proudly proclaimed myself the ultimate nihilist.
Twice I became the most powerful being in our reality, only to have unlimited might slip from my grasp.
I even died once and served as Death's loyal servant.
But the fates had a dark role mapped out for me that could not be denied.
So life was restored to me to fulfill my part in this final drama.
You wonder how and why?
I shall tell you. But where do I begin?
I know...

Akhenaten.
He was an 18th dynasty pharaoh in ancient Egypt.
Being the product of selective inbreeding, Akhenaten believed himself the spokesman for the god Aten.
So he ordered the closing of the temples of Amun and moved Egypt's capital from Thebes to the newly-built city of Akhetaten.
Like all pharaohs, his power was slave-based and his rule ruthless.
His insane reign lasted nearly 17 years.
How he died, nobody knows.
For in death, Akhenaten became a mystery.

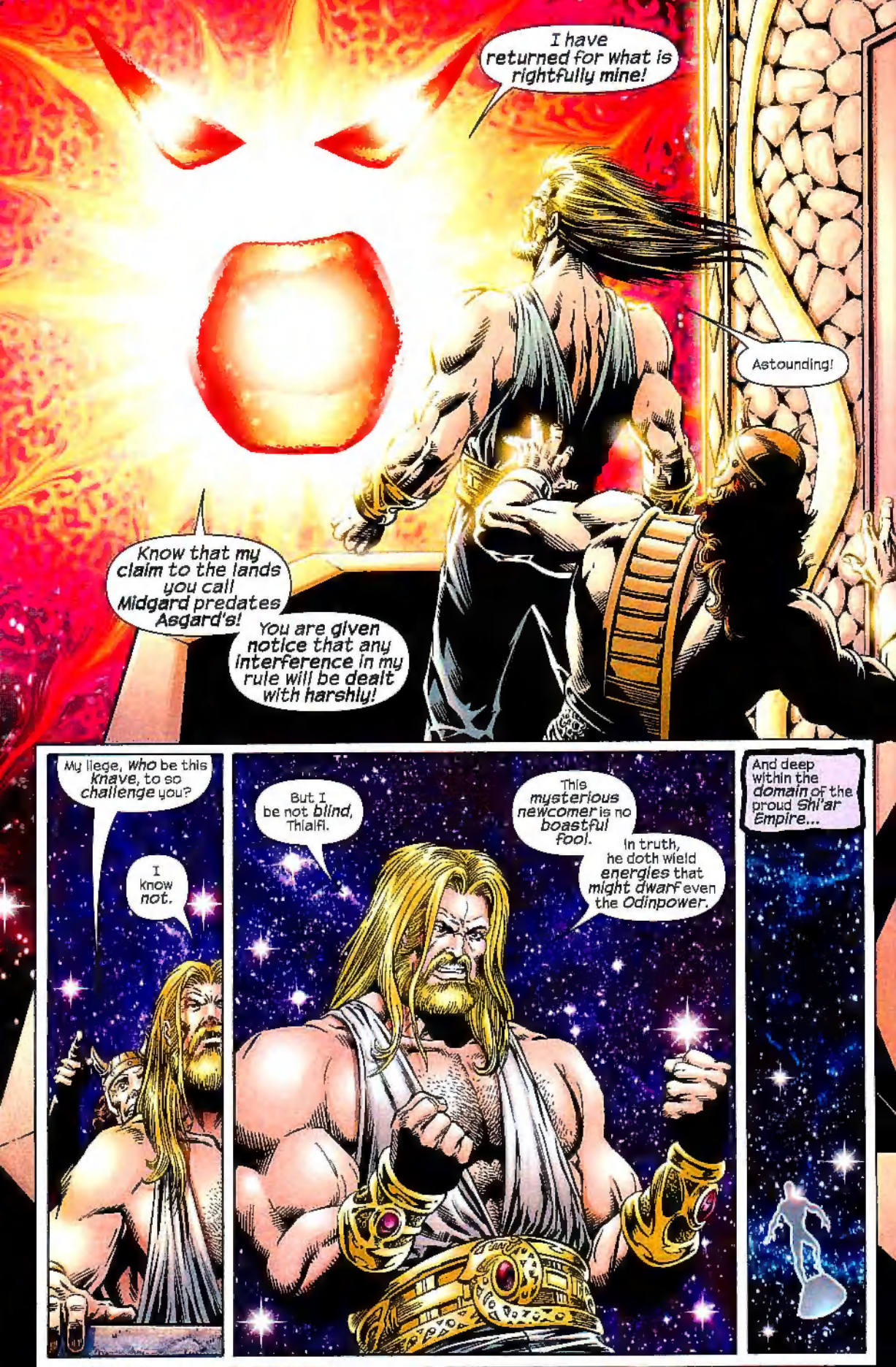

"Modern archeologists have *found* and *identified* most of Egypt's ancient rulers.
"Akhenaten is sort of the *missing link* of pharaohs, his *mummy* never located.
"His *crypt* was discovered *empty*, as if never used.
"Some say *Horemheb*, a later pharaoh, ordered the tomb *emptied*...
"...seeking to *expunge* Akhenaten from history.
"Others speculate simple *grave robbers* were responsible.
"Myself, I *don't buy* either explanation."
I just *feel* that *something else* happened.
What?
I don't know.

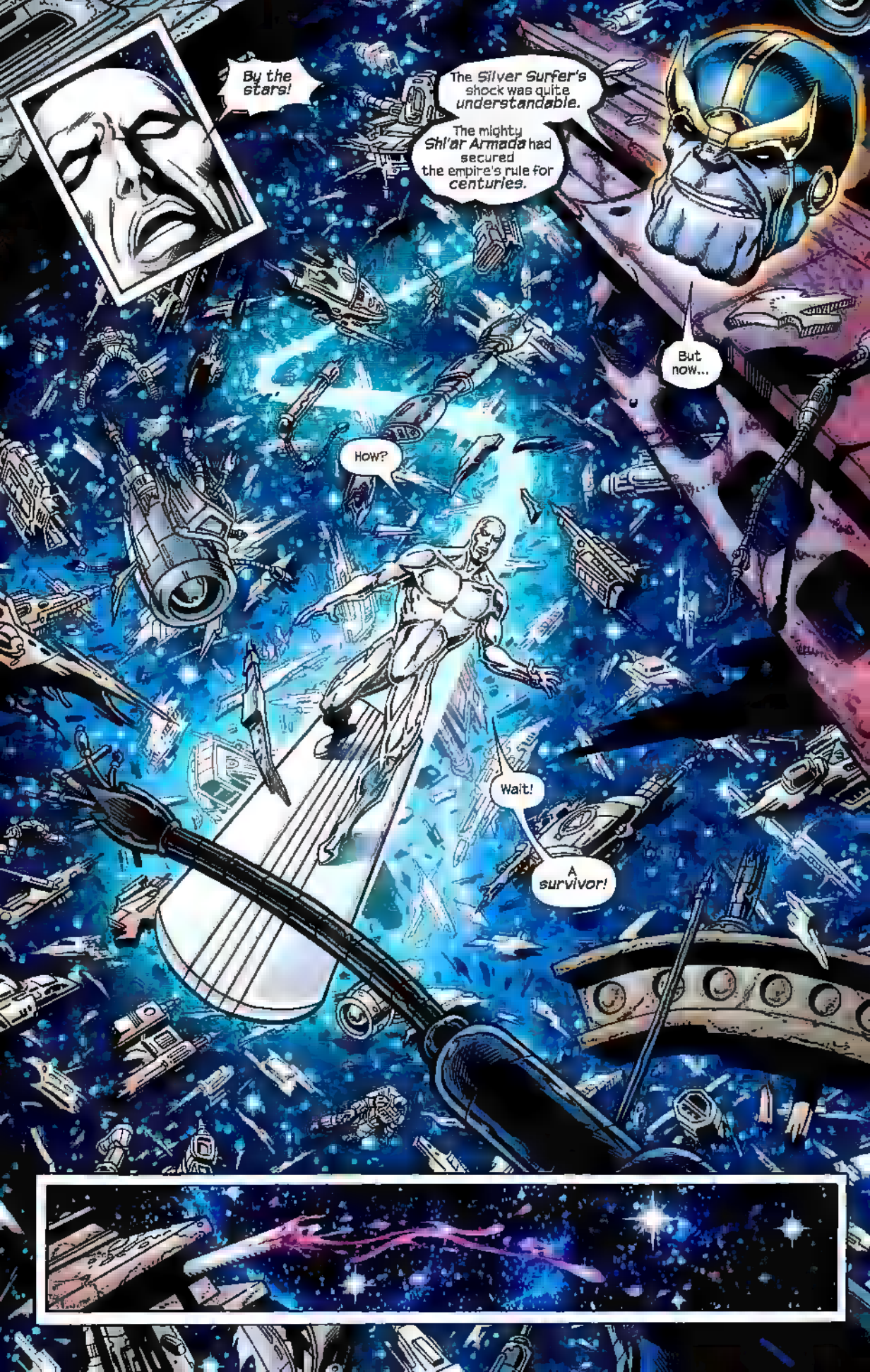
You dropped the iced tea!
I didn't think Jean Grey was capable of dropping anything.
Dizzy.
Are you all right?
I don't know.
Feel strange.
And where did all that stuff about Akhenaten come from?
Research I did back when we were dealing with the Living Pharaoh.
Hank, I hadn't thought about it in years.
It just sort of popped out, unbidden.
Perhaps you ought to let Professor X know.
Why?
It's nothing.
Jean, I would have a word with you.

Akhenaten.
You too?
For the past hour or so.
What's going on here?
Grave approaching danger, I fear.
Kenry, contact and call in all X-Men.
Jean, further intelligence on this matter is urgently needed.
The next to become aware of the coming doom was not exactly of this universe, but an intricate facet of its structure.
Deep within the Cosmic Vortex our reality resides, ever struggling against the pull of the abyss.

We are anchored in place by arcane forces emanating from a mere child.
Atleza shoulders this burden from a pavilion deep within a sphere of darkness.
She has two very unique guardians.
Gamora, look how complex Atleza's spells are becoming.
Soon she will no longer require our presence.
Adam Warlock, are you getting tired of babysitting?
No, but...
Atleza! What's wrong?
A new element...
Shifting balances of power...
Everything is about to change.

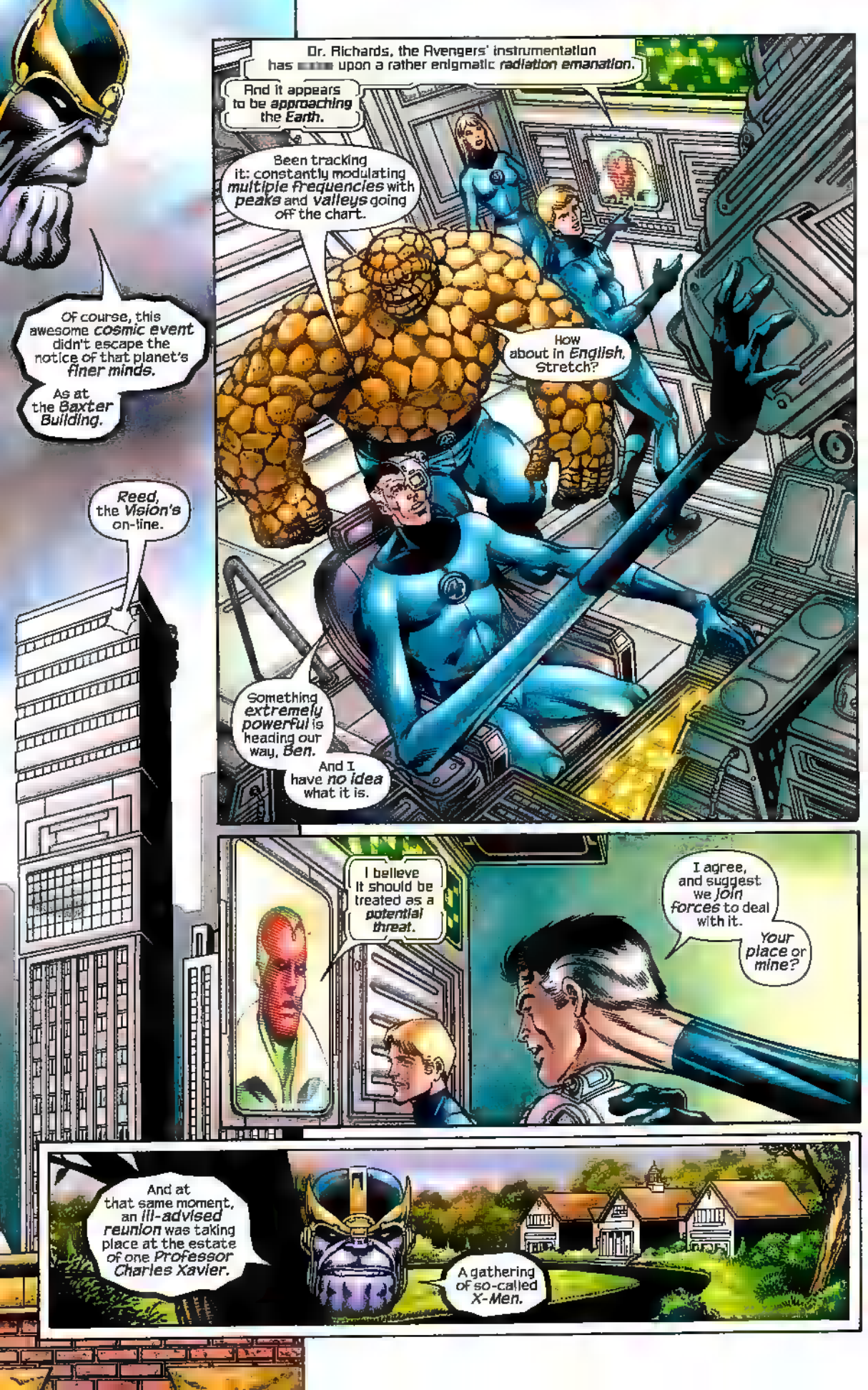
The first to actually make contact with the gathering cosmic storm was the ruler of fabled Asgard.
This supposed god was still uncertain as to how he should wield his newfound might and depended heavily on the guidance of his vizier.
It is said that a fine veneer doth require a gentle touch.
Wise words, Thialfi, but yonder realm is a troubled land.
My heart spurs me to use the Odinforce to simply eradicate all the evil forces that threaten Asgard.
Why then did your father not do thus?
Perhaps because Odin recognized the need of balancing Asgard's safety against the rights of those who do oppose it?
Then what be the benefit of possessing almost limitless power if--
Sire!
Hear me, Lord Thor!
I give thee notice and warning!
Who?


I have returned for what is rightfully mine!
Astounding!
Know that my claim to the lands you call Midgard predates Asgard's!
You are given notice that any interference in my rule will be dealt with harshly!
My liege, who be this knave, to so challenge you?
I know not.
But I be not blind, Thialfi.
This mysterious newcomer is no boastful fool.
In truth, he doth wield energies that might dwarf even the Odinpower.
And deep within the domain of the proud Shi'ar Empire...


By the stars!
The Silver Surfer's shock was quite understandable.
The mighty Shi'ar Armada had secured the empire's rule for centuries.
But now...
How?
Wait!
A survivor!

You are known as *Gladiator*, are you not?
What *occurred* here?
Shi'ar Command sensors registered an approaching *energy signature* of a *disturbing nature.*
The *fleet* was sent out to *investigate.*
The *force* didn't even *slow* its pace as it *decimated* our ranks.
It *continued* on its *way* as if we were *nothing.*
Heading *which way?*
Gladiator?

As you likely suspect, I was already [illegible] of the existence of this mysterious power.
In fact, for the past year or so, I had been actively seeking it.
For despite my forsaking any efforts to either dominate or destroy all life in the universe, I felt possessing such might was advisable.
A centuries-long existence, some miscalculations and an unyielding disposition have rewarded me with scores of powerful enemies and few allies.
My thinking was that such power would deter anyone seeking righteous retribution for some perceived past misdeed on my part.
But the source of these awesome energies proved elusive.
My scanners would continuously detect the unique energy emanation and then lose it.
I began to despair that mine was a futile quest.
But only yesterday I was searching a sector of the Herculean Galaxy when ...
...the desired energy signature came through loud and clear...
...and did not vanish.
But the joy of success was tempered by the realization...
...that the source of these emanations [illegible] heading directly toward...
...the planet Earth.


Dr. Richards, the Avengers' instrumentation has [redacted] upon a rather enigmatic radiation emanation.
And it appears to be approaching the Earth.
Been tracking it: constantly modulating multiple frequencies with peaks and valleys going off the chart.
How about in English, Stretch?
Something extremely powerful is heading our way, Ben.
And I have no idea what it is.
Of course, this awesome cosmic event didn't escape the notice of that planet's finer minds.
As at the Baxter Building.
Reed, the Vision's on-line.
I believe it should be treated as a potential threat.
I agree, and suggest we join forces to deal with it.
Your place or mine?
And at that same moment, an ill-advised reunion was taking place at the estate of one Professor Charles Xavier.
A gathering of so-called X-Men.

'Bout time the rest of *Warren's group* showed up.

How's this going to shake down, Rogue?

Now, Angel, we find out if there's some *real danger* out there whose *tail* needs *kicking*...

...or if this call up is the Professor's *clever way* of springing a *surprise birthday party* on one of us.

Wouldn't *bet* on the *chocolate cake*, Bobby.

Emma, why isn't *Hank* operating *Cerebra*?

What transpires?

And *where's* the *Professor*?

Apparently trying to make some sort of *off-world contact*, Warren.

We've been called in to *fight aliens*?

Anyone we *know*?

Don't know, *Scott*. The Professor *only* wanted *Jean* with him.

Think they're *trying* something a bit *different*.

I'm afraid the Professor was *rather vague* about what's going down, *Gambit*.

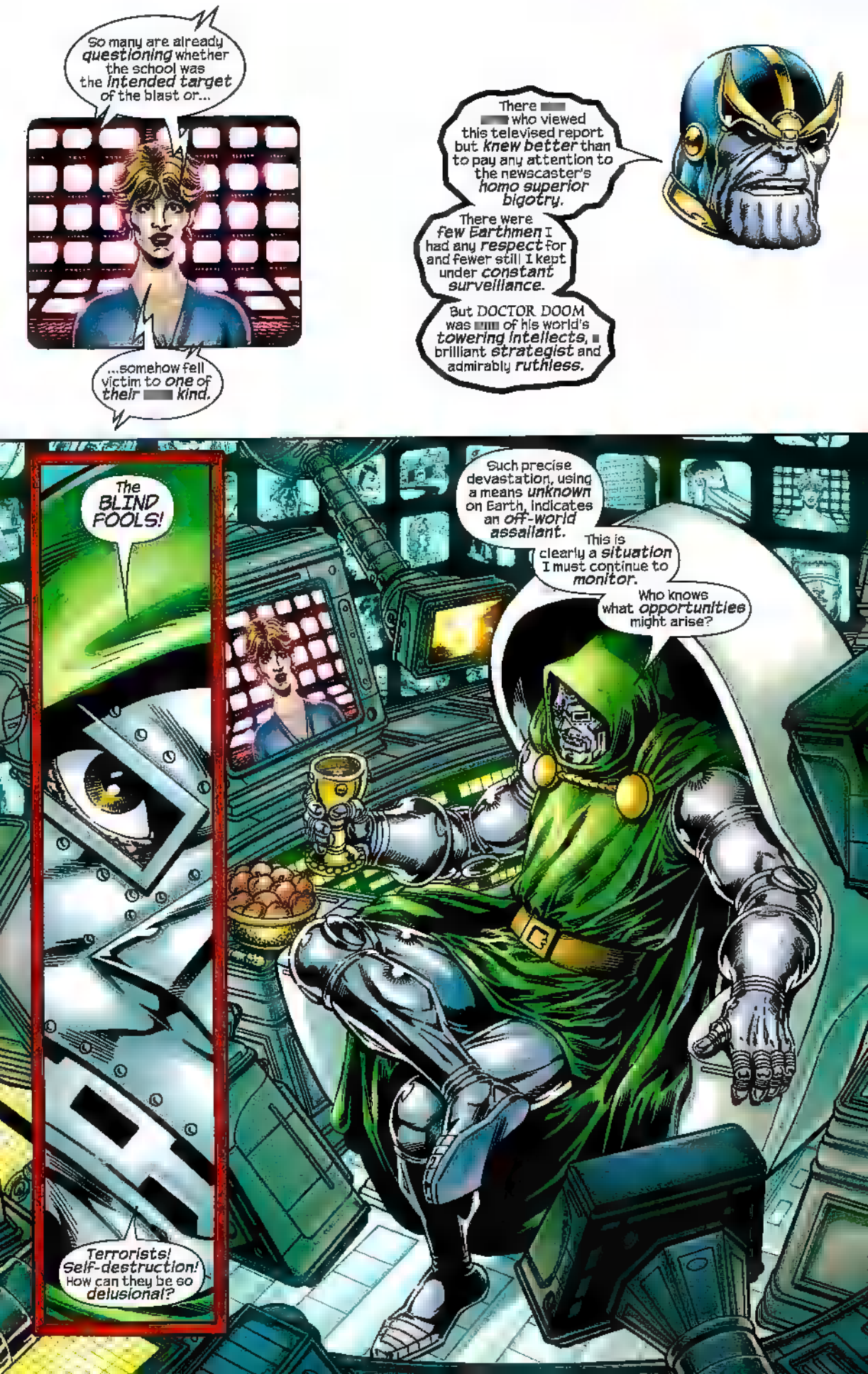
But he looked *worried*.

And when he worries, I start *tightening* my *safety belt*.

I'm not sure I'm comfortable with us inking up like this, especially without Hank at the controls.
To extend the range of my telepathic communication abilities, I need the boost of both Cerebra and your own psychic powers, Jean.
Henry's absence seems a prudent precaution in case of any unforeseen feedback.
His is too fine a mind to needlessly fry.
All right. Activating Cerebra.
Now relax, Jean.
Allow me to tap into your well of psi-energy and add it to my own.
We'll be reaching out now, beyond the confines of the estate...
...beyond the limits of our planet and into the depths of space.
I'm beginning to feel something as we near the edge of our solar system...
We have made contact!
My God!
Exactly.
I am truly touched by this warm reception.
Greetings, my subjects.

I, the great Pharaoh Akhenaten, have returned to claim what is mine.
My rule will be just and my reign prosperous.
As the chosen agent of the grand council, I welcome you to the Celestial Order.
Chaos is now banned from this sector and a new day begins.
Henceforth, the faithful will be richly rewarded and those who turn their back to the light...
...will be cast into the darkness.
Unfortunately, looking into your hearts...
...I see that you will never accept the truth I bring you.
So...
[redacted] have to get out of here. Professor!
Too late.

Just in! The sprawling Westchester, New York estate of the world famous Professor Charles Xavier has reportedly been engulfed within a towering fireball.
Witnesses state that no one could have possibly survived the explosion.
Tremors from the blast were felt as far away as New York City.
A spokesman has informed us that the FBI is currently treating the incident as an act of terrorism and will investigate it accordingly.
But it should be pointed out that the estate was the home of the Xavier Institute...
The so-called mutant school.


So many are already questioning whether the school was the intended target of the blast or...
...somehow fell victim to one of their [redacted] kind.
There [redacted] who viewed this televised report but knew better than to pay any attention to the newscaster's homo superior bigotry.
There were few Earthmen I had any respect for and fewer still I kept under constant surveillance.
But DOCTOR DOOM was [redacted] of his world's towering intellects, [redacted] brilliant strategist and admirably ruthless.
The BLIND FOOLS!
Such precise devastation, using a means unknown on Earth, indicates an off-world assailant.
This is clearly a situation I must continue to monitor.
Who knows what opportunities might arise?
Terrorists! Self-destruction! How can they be so delusional?

Tell-el-Amarna, one of hundreds of archeological sites that dot Egypt.
But what made this particular site significant was the fact that in ancient days this is where...
...the once-capital city of Akhetaten stood.
You're right, Yassar!
There is something in front of the sun.
Too big and slow for a plane...
It almost looks like a...
An hour later, in Washington D.C....
...in the office of the supposed most powerful man on Earth...
...a lesson in relativity was about to be illustrated.
NO MORE ENRONS!
NO WAR WITH IRAQ!
COME CLEAN ON HALLIBURTON!
SAVE OUR PLANET!

Defense reports no traces of radiation emanating from the Westchester blast site.
And this isn't looking like the work of terrorists.
Then maybe we ought to bring the Avengers into this.
Always make these things so hard to open.
My guess is they already know more about what went down than [redacted] do.
I'll contact their liaison officer.
What about casualties?
They appear to be limited to the school grounds.
The institute was extremely private, so we're going to have trouble getting a complete list of fatalities.
There will be children included among the dead.
Dear God.
Anything else?
We're getting some odd reports out of Egypt.
There may have been another strange explosion there.
But we've apparently lost contact with--
MR. PRESIDENT!
Where'd he go?!
He just vanished!

Much to President Bush's horror, he discovered that he was but one of the many world leaders that Akhenaten chose to abduct and transport to his newly-rebuilt capital city of Akhetaten.

Needless to say, it was a situation none of the hostages were prepared to deal with.

What are we doing here?

Better question is how'd we get here?

Condoleeza?

Mr. President, is this some kind of terrorist plot?

Doubt it. Cheney never briefed me on bin Laden being able to teleport things.

Preposterous!

Doctor Doom kidnapped like some common lout!?

A costume party?

It's like an ancient Egyptian Disneyland!

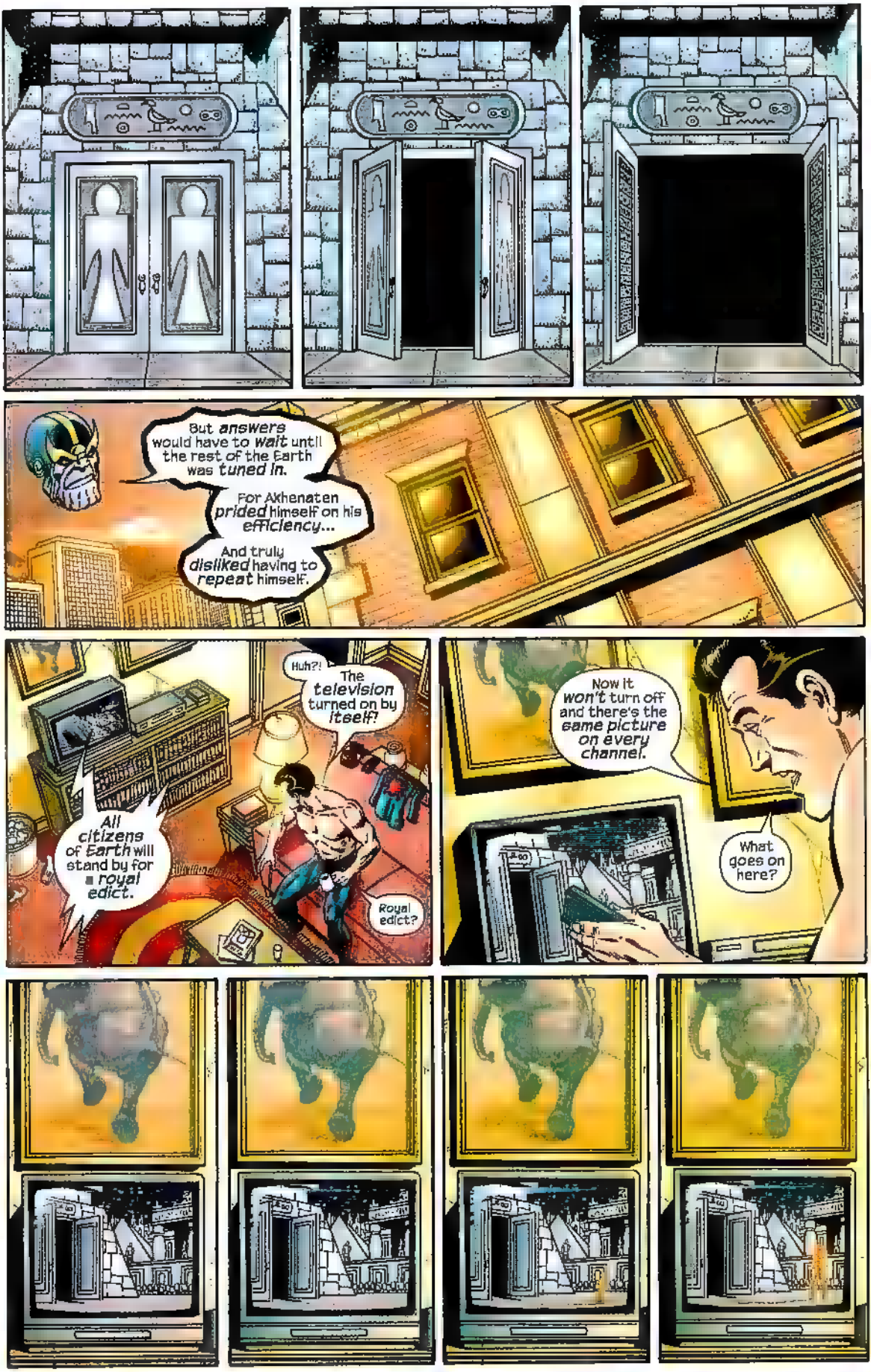
This is the big joke, no?

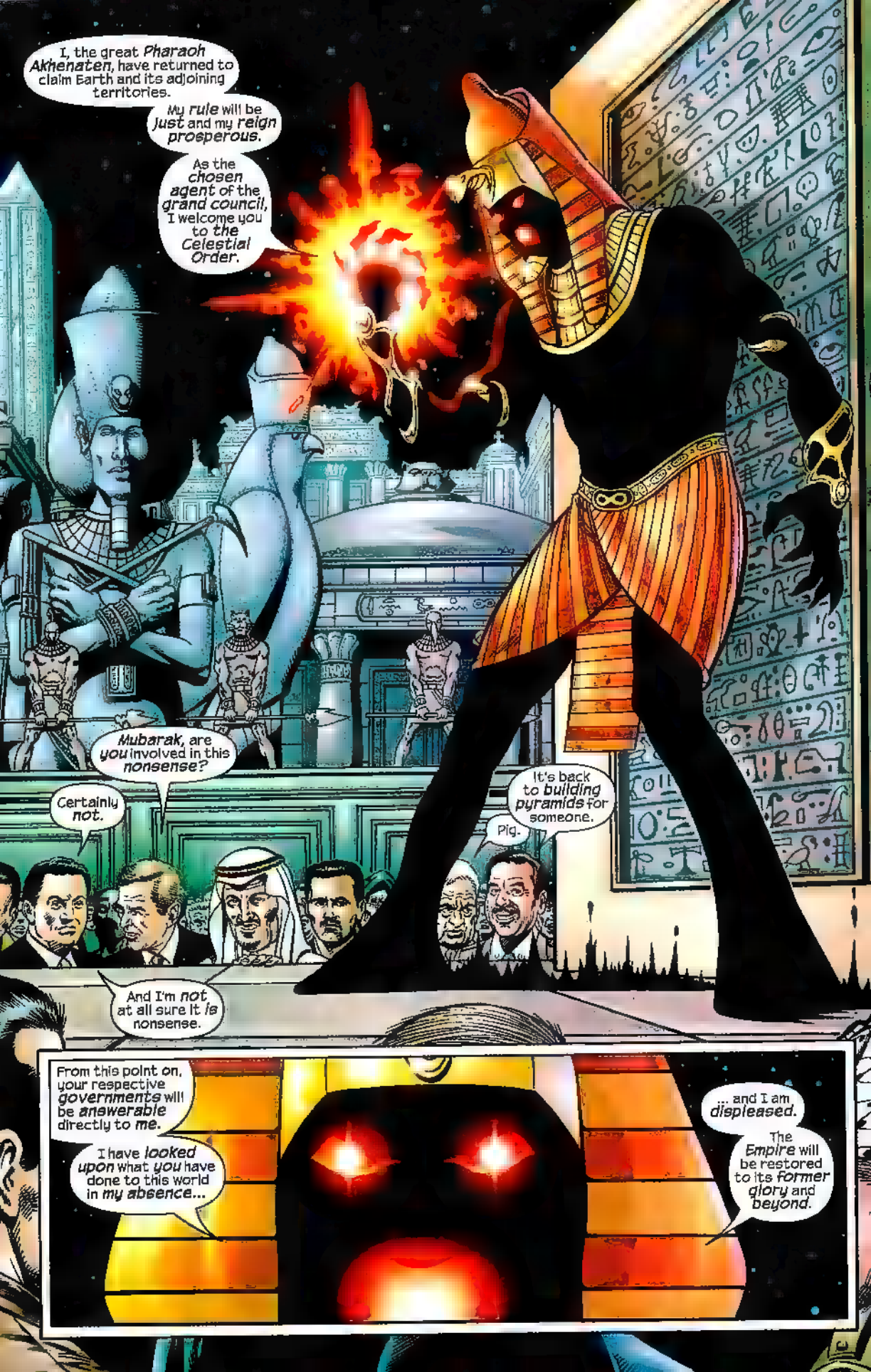
I want to know who's responsible for this bloody outrage!

It's clearly an insidious Zionist scheme.

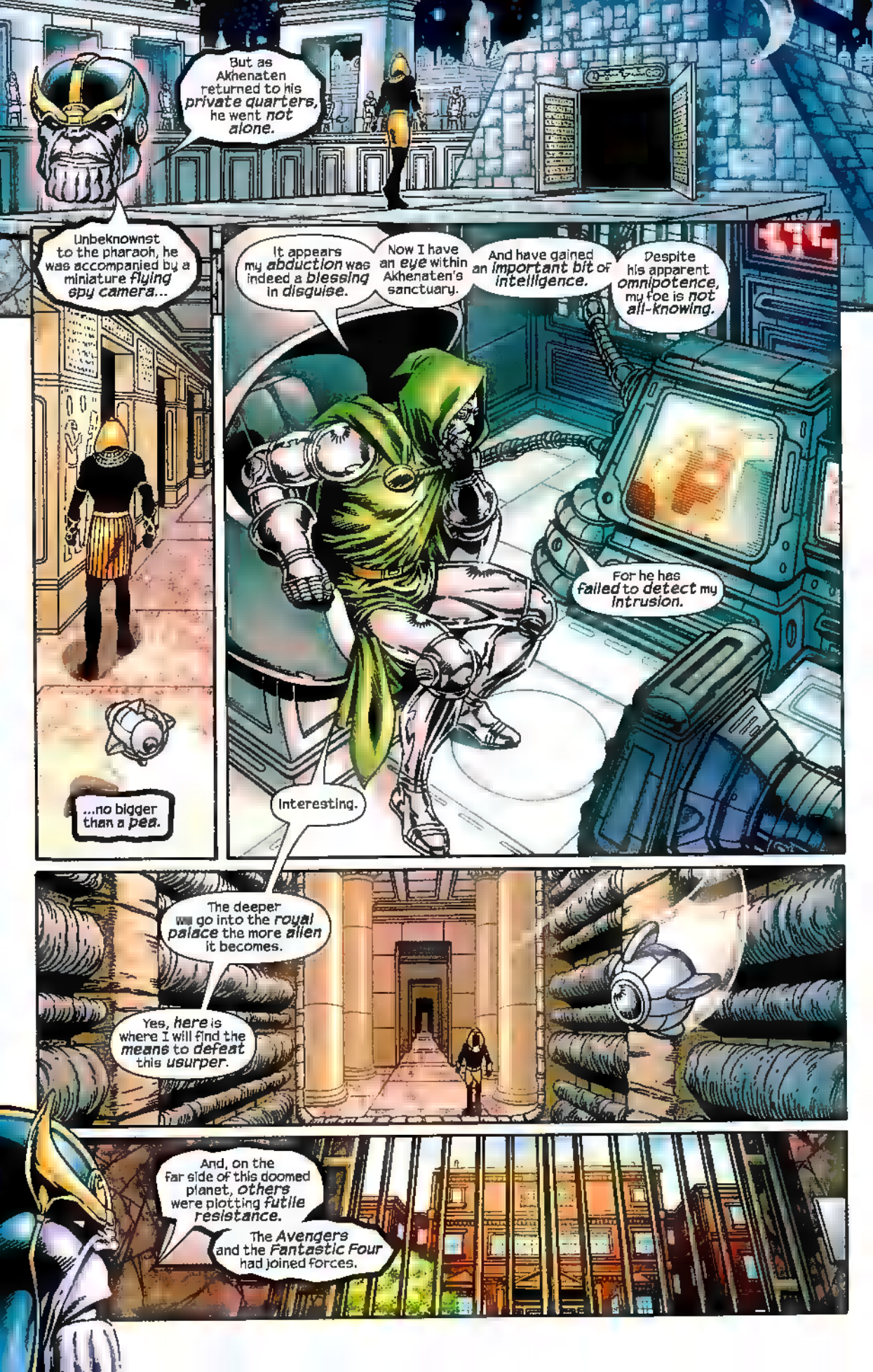
More likely an Arab trick.

After all, this is Egypt! Isn't it?


But answers would have to wait until the rest of the Earth was tuned in.
For Akhenaten prided himself on his efficiency...
And truly disliked having to repeat himself.
Huh?!
The television turned on by itself?
All citizens of Earth will stand by for a royal edict.
Royal edict?
Now it won't turn off and there's the same picture on every channel.
What goes on here?


I, the great Pharaoh Akhenaten, have returned to claim Earth and its adjoining territories.
My rule will be just and my reign prosperous.
As the chosen agent of the grand council, I welcome you to the Celestial Order.
Mubarak, are you involved in this nonsense?
Certainly not.
It's back to building pyramids for someone.
Pig.
And I'm not at all sure it is nonsense.
From this point on, your respective governments will be answerable directly to me.
I have looked upon what you have done to this world in my absence...
... and I am displeased.
The Empire will be restored to its former glory and beyond.

Resist me in these efforts and many will die horribly.
Submit to my righteous authority and the rewards will be wondrous.
This can't be happening!
Where's Bush?!
This has to be his doing!
To illustrate the benefits of unquestioning obedience, I give you the remedy for the diseases of cancer and AIDS.
All who suffer from these afflictions are now cured.
So return to your minor capitals and await my pleasure.
Each country will shortly be given work assignments.
Conquest and notification are complete.
Now I must prepare for resistance...
...and the merciless crushing of it.


But as Akhenaten returned to his private quarters, he went not alone.
Unbeknownst to the pharaoh, he was accompanied by a miniature flying spy camera...
...no bigger than a pea.
It appears my abduction was indeed a blessing in disguise.
Now I have an eye within Akhenaten's sanctuary.
And have gained an important bit of intelligence.
Despite his apparent omnipotence, my foe is not all-knowing.
For he has failed to detect my intrusion.
Interesting.
The deeper I go into the royal palace the more alien it becomes.
Yes, here is where I will find the means to defeat this usurper.
And, on the far side of this doomed planet, others were plotting futile resistance.
The Avengers and the Fantastic Four had joined forces.

And the *President* has been returned to the White House, *safe* and *sound*.

It's beginning to look like this *Akhenaten* has some kind of *wish-fulfilling power*.

As the *Black Panther* was to us, *Colonel Fury*.

Anything he *envisions* becomes *reality*.

How do we *fight* that?

Cap, the *Falcon's* returned with the last of the *reservists*.

Fill them in on the situation, *Hank*.

Never before seen such weird readings.

What a gathering of *powerhouses!*

I almost feel *sorry* for whomever it is we're going up against.

Don't.

Cap, here's the latest *satellite photos* of Tell-el-Amarna.

Benjamin J. Grimm, if you let *Hercules* talk you into one of his *useless brawls* you'll also receive a *wasp-sting*.

At *full force*, they're quite *painful*.

'Tis *true*, friend Grimm.

Beware!

Sure, whatever.

Remember when this job used ta have a height requirement?

Warriors, be aware that you are in the royal presence.
How?
Let it be known that Akhenaten the Just comes to you with a proposition.
Become my loyal bodyguards and live...
Or refuse and die.
Some offer.
I give you one hour to consider my proposal.
Don't need it.
Take your job offer and...
Ben, don't!
...SHOVE IT!
So be it.

Alas, I knew their *pride* would *blind* them to the *truth*.
[illegible]t, even in *death*, they shall prove *useful* to the *empire*.
Let them *illuminate* the *folly* of *disobedience*.
So far the *U.S.* has wasted three *F-16s* and six *cruise missiles* trying to penetrate the *force field* surrounding Tell-el-Amarna.
Looks like it's time to call in the *Avengers*, Colonel.
Believe me, Agent Jones, I'd *love* to pass this *hot potato* on to them.
Only *one problem* with the idea.
It appears them and the *FF* just went *MIA* on us.

Colonel Fury, you and your world should thank heaven that Doctor Doom stands with you in this danger.
For I alone have a window into Akhenaten's fortress and mind.
Pity you can't fully appreciate the irony of that situation.
Doom, who most on this primitive planet consider a black-hearted villain...
...may well prove to be mankind's salvation.
Meanwhile, the Silver Surfer was returning to a certain primitive planet...
...in order to warn its defenders of [illegible] that had already conquered it.
But the space traveler never reached his intended destination.
What?
A teleportation gate detoured him to an unexpected rendezvous with...

THANOS of Titan!
I mean you no harm, Surfer.
Since when?
Who?
Norrin Radd, please don't.
We haven't time to waste on useless conflict.
Trust me, the Titan is on our side in this
CAPTAIN MARVEL?!
And my once-fellow DEFENDERS: Dr. Strange, Namor and the Hulk?
What peril gives birth to such a bizarre union?
And in the heart of New York City...
Spider-Man!
What's with the crosses?
I sometimes forget, Murdock, that you're blind.
You're a lucky Daredevil.

Without true sight, you see the world through your other ultra-sensitive senses.

You know exactly where the crosses hover from the sound of our voices bouncing off them.

You probably discern their shape from the feel of the wind currents passing over them.

But you have no way of telling they're transparent containers, do you?

No. What's inside them?

Not what.

Who?

Friends.

All the Avengers...

...and the Fantastic Four.

A lie?

A trick?

No.

I can detect no breathing.

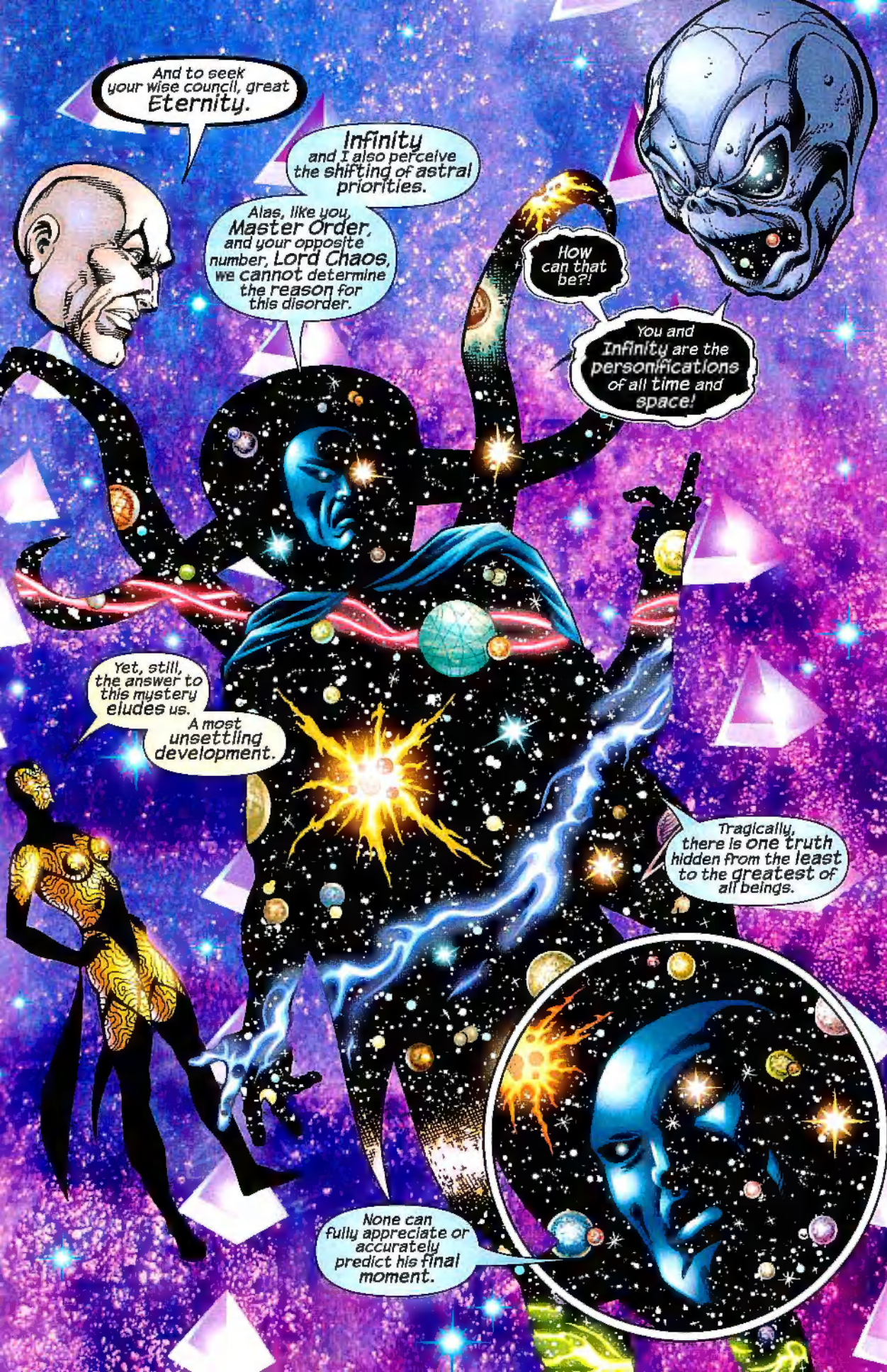
No heartbeats.

I know.

Who did this?

Sorry, Daredevil, I've run out of answers.

In fabled Olympus, another sought answers and an ally.
Lord Zeus, I come to you with grave tidings.
Noble Thor, I be already sadly aware of our perilous situation.
My loving son, Hercules, hath moments ago fallen to the Pharaoh Akhenaten's evil.
I loathe to inform you that he did perish with your fellow Avengers.
Damnation! Then this Akhenaten has much to atone for.
A task I fear that may prove beyond our capabilities.
Our foe's strength surpasses even that of the Odinpower and your own Olympian might combined?
Aye, 'tis seemingly unlimited energies this villain wields.
Then what...?
We gather allies of great power who have as much to lose as we.
Together, we may yet prevail against gathering darkness.
A darkness that worried forces even greater than mankind and gods.
Worried and perplexed.
We have sensed a perilous imbalance in the cosmic flow but cannot discern the disruption's cause.
So we came to warn you of our concern.


And to seek your wise council, great Eternity.
Infinity and I also perceive the shifting of astral priorities.
Alas, like you, Master Order, and your opposite number, Lord Chaos, we cannot determine the reason for this disorder.
How can that be?!
You and Infinity are the personifications of all time and space!
Yet, still, the answer to this mystery eludes us.
A most unsettling development.
Tragically, there is one truth hidden from the least to the greatest of all beings.
None can fully appreciate or accurately predict his final moment.

And so, amidst foreboding and ignorance, the planet Earth *fell* to the might of the all-powerful *Celestial Order* before any even truly *perceived* the presence of the *galactic conqueror*.
The *Pharaoh Akhenaten* had returned, his *four thousand-year-old regime* resurrected, and now prepared to *extend* its *rule* throughout the heavens.
This was but the *start* of our *grand tragedy*.
A mere *puddle* compared to the *ocean* of *sorrowful tears* to come.
The *dying* had just *begun*.

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